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ABSTRACT

The world is in a period of rapid change. Trends in moving to a high technology information society, a world economy, more ethnic groups, an increasing economic gap between the rich and the poor, and more people living in poverty present enormous challenges and opportunities for the counseling profession. Counseling must broaden its focus from a narrow intrapsychic perspective to a more systems oriented perspective including a social context for change. The social context of change has for the most part been ignored and the counseling profession has been largely ineffective in responding to a multitude of social issues that have arisen. What seems to be needed is both a broadening of perspective and a wider array of intervention techniques. Counselors must move to a more pluralistic perspective in working with clients. Counseling needs to take an integrated, dynamic, holistic view of health that eliminates mechanistic explanations. Research needs to be strengthened and furthered. Perhaps research needs to be viewed from a much broader perspective than traditional scientific models. If counseling can include social issues, be more effective with poor and minority populations, change theories to fit the new paradigms of science, emphasize prevention, work with other disciplines, and strengthen research, counseling can be relevant and viable into the next century. (ABL)

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VISION AND VOCATION IN COMMUNITY COUNSELING

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VISION AND VOCATION IN COMMUNITY COUNSELING

The world is in a period of rapid change. We are moving from being an industrial society to becoming a high tech information society, from a national economy to a world economy, from authoritarian governments hopefully to democratic governments. We have more and more ethnic groups living in the United States. We have an increased economic gap between the rich and the poor. According to new Census Bureau statistics there are currently 35 million people living under the poverty level, more than any time in our history since 1964. These trends present enormous challenges and opportunities for the counseling profession. There are numerous tasks that we must undertake in order to remain relevant and viable. I would like to talk about some of the tasks that community counselors face as we move into the next century.

First, we must broaden our focus from a narrow intrapsychic perspective to a more systems oriented perspective including a social context for change. We have in recent years taken on a clearly narrower focus emphasizing intrapsychic change, technology, and technique. The social context of change has for the most part been ignored. The counseling profession has been largely ineffective in responding to a multitude of social issues that have arisen. These issues include racism, women and gay rights, drugs, alienation from the establishment culture, poverty, homelessness, current unemployment related to our present weak economy, gang violence, and natural disasters such as the recent hurricanes. Application has focused on self-awareness, insight, and self-discovery. James

Hillman, former head of the Jung Institute, in a recent interview stated:

> We've had a hundred years of analysis, and people are getting more and more sensitive, and the world is getting worse and worse. We still locate the psyche inside the skin. You go *inside* to locate the psyche, you examine *your* feelings and *your* dreams, they belong to you. Or it's interrelations, interpsyche, between your psyche and mine. And now that's been extended a little bit into family systems and office groups - but it's still only within people. We're working on our relationships constantly, and our feelings and reflections, but look what's left out of that. What's left out is a deteriorating world.
>
> So why hasn't therapy noticed that? Because psychotherapy is only working on that "inside" soul. But by removing the soul from the world and not recognizing that the soul is also in the world, psychotherapy can't do its job anymore. The buildings are sick, the institutions are sick, the schools are sick, the banking system's sick - the sickness is there (Ventura, 1990).

What seems to be needed is both a broadening of perspective and a wider array of intervention techniques. We need to be alert to how social issues affect our clients. We need to learn to create a context, offer permission, or establish a therapeutic method for dealing

with these issues with our clients. And we need to become more socially conscious ourselves.

We must move to a more pluralistic perspective in working with clients. Traditional counseling has been non-egalitarian and office-bound as well as intrapsychically focused. We must learn better ways of providing services, and more effective methods of counseling poor and minority populations. To achieve a more pluralistic perspective the role of a counselor must include that of a change agent, working to affect the environment in which the client lives. Environmental interventions might include confronting and modifying institutional bureaucracies and working to reduce racism, sexism, and other discriminatory attitudes toward minorities.

There are new paradigms in the world of science that have enormous although uncertain potential applications to counseling. For example quantum physics developed as a response to the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm which failed to adequately explain subatomic phenomena. It did not work in the realm of the very small. The new paradigm according to quantum theory and from other disciplines is based on a general systems view of life and in harmony with many spiritual views. The principles of this new paradigm emphasize relationships rather than isolated parts, process thinking, wholistic thinking, wellness, and inherent dynamics of relationships. The direct implication for counseling would require counseling to take an integrated, dynamic, wholistic view of health that eliminates mechanistic explanations. It would view the human organism as an inte-

grated whole involving interdependent physical and psychological patterns. It would adapt what Capra calls a bootstrap approach to the understanding of the human psyche. Schools of therapy would not limit themselves to a narrow range of psychological phenomena such as sexuality, object relations, birth trauma, existential problems, irrational thinking, and so on. Not that these approaches are wrong, but that each of them focuses on only a small part of the human psyche and then tries to generalize its understanding of that part to the entire psyche. According to the bootstrap approach there is not any one theory capable of explaining the entire spectrum of psychological phenomena. Perhaps we as counselors may have to instead consider a network of interlocking models, using different languages to describe different aspects and levels of reality, and different cultural orientations.

There seems to be a major shift in the direction of wholistic health and wellness. With so many people in need of mental health care and unable to obtain it, primarily for economic reasons, we must continue to find effective preventive proactive approaches aimed at initiating, anticipating, and reaching out to the community in anticipation of debilitating life problems. Many hospitals, medical centers, corporations and community mental health centers have been increasing their number of outreach programs, offering programs in areas such as stress management, nutrition and aerobics. As this trend continues we will also need well-designed programs for drug abuse prevention, premarital counseling, parenting, interpersonal communications, violence prevention, and building self-esteem

among others. Perhaps we could lobby insurance providers to underwite some of these programs. I find it strange that insurers will pay huge sums for remediation, but often refuse to even look at prevention. For example we have seventeen oak trees on our property, and a few of them have dead limbs or branches that are a hazard, and could fall on our house. The insurance company won't pay for the few hundred dollars in maintenance costs to prevent their destroying our house, but if they fall they will readily cover the thousands of dollars in repairs.

If we truly consider the human organism as an integrated whole, and many problems in the field of mental health as multidimensional, then input is required from many academic disciplines and professional specialties for solutions. We must find ways of working together and learning from other disciplines. Disciplines develop their own values, perceptions and jargon, and fail to communicate with each other. There is a very low level of social intercourse between the many relevant fields in universities. We have so organized human knowledge that it appears to have little relevancy for people in different disciplines. For example there are barriers between mental health professionals and biologists, and similarly between mental health professionals and physicians. As Fritjof Capra states,

> A systems approach provides a common framework for understanding the biological and psychological manifestations of human organisms in health and illness, one that is likely to lead to mutually stimulating exchanges

> between biologists and psychologists. It also means that if this is the time for physicians to take a closer look at the psychological aspects of illness, it is also time for psychotherapists to increase their knowledge of human biology. (Capra 1982)

Perhaps we could have teams of health professionals working together from a wholistic framework in which the transpersonal-spiritual self, the psychoemotional self, and the socio-cultural context in which the individual lives are taken into account. Some teams might consist of nurses, physicians, and counselors. Another possibility could be teams consisting of dietitians, counselors, and physical fitness experts working together from a wholistic wellness framework.

Another task we face is that of strengthening and furthering research. Perhaps we need to view research from a much broader perspective than the traditional scientific models. We must find new research designs other than sociostatistical experimental designs that would be more applicable, and meaningful to counselors, and encourage counselors in ways of becoming scientist practitioners.

We do face a broad variety of tasks as we move into the 21st Century. How can we broaden the focus of counseling to include social issues? How can we be more effective with minority and poor populations? How can we change counseling theories to fit the new paradigms in the sciences? Can we design and deliver programs with an emphasis on prevention? How can we work with other dis-

ciplines? And how can we strengthen and further research? If we can effectively meet these tasks, we will be relevant, and viable into the next century. If we fail to meet these challenges, we may go the way of the dinosaur. However, as a profession working together I think we can solve the many issues that confront us.

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